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TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Commission on Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities
Expert Meeting on Consumer Interests, Competitiveness,
Competition and Development
Geneva, 17-19 October 2001

# PROVISIONAL AGENDA AND ANNOTATIONS

## I. Provisional agenda

1. Election of officers

2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

3. The role of consumer and competition policies in enhancing competitiveness and development

4. Adoption of the outcome of the Meeting.

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## II. Annotations to the provisional agenda

### Item 1. Election of officers

1. The Expert Meeting is expected to elect a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson-cum-Rapporteur.

### Item 2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

2. The provisional agenda for the Expert Meeting is reproduced in section I above. The provisional schedule of meetings for the three days is given below.

### Item 3. The role of consumer and competition policies in enhancing competitiveness and development

3. In order to be competitive in globalizing markets and to achieve sustainable development, countries increasingly need to take into account consumer interests, both domestically and internationally. There is growing consensus that consumer interests are best satisfied in markets where competition can prevail. In such markets, enterprises need to take fully into account consumer needs and preferences, in terms of both quality and innovation, but also with respect to price signals reflected by markets free from abuses of monopolies and dominant firms. Accordingly, competition and consumer affairs usually go hand in hand, and in most countries the two issues are dealt with by the same ministry.

4. UNCTAD X requested UNCTAD to "strengthen the capacity of public institutions for competition and consumer protection in developing countries and help them to educate the public and representatives of the private sector in this field" (Plan of Action, para.141). The Fourth UN Conference to Review All Aspects of the Set of Restrictive Business Practices (Geneva 25-29 September 2000) invited UNCTAD to convene an Expert Meeting on Consumer Policy "as a distinct body from the IGE on Competition Law and Policy".

5. Hence, taking into account the existing UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection (A/C.2/54/L.24), the Expert Meeting will examine the new dimensions of consumer concerns, especially in developing countries and economies in transition, resulting from globalization and liberalization, such as the effects of privatization of utilities on consumers, deregulation and increased competition in the market place of developing countries, consumers' access to damage redress consumer representation, and consumer access to financial services; and it will formulate appropriate recommendations for action in capacity-building for rule-making and enforcement, consumer education and enhancement activities, as well as international cooperation in this field, with a view to responding appropriately to the important requests made by UNCTAD X and the Fourth Review Conference. In its task, the Expert Meeting will have before it for consideration, the conclusions and recommendations in this respect of four regional meetings held prior to it, in Cartagena (Colombia) on 23-25 July 2001; in Accra (Ghana) on 20-21 August 2001; in Goa (India) on 10-11 September 2001; and in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) on 1-2 October 2001.

Documentation

TD/B/COM.1/EM.17/2 "Consumer protection, competition, competitiveness and development"

Item 4: Adoption of the outcome of the Meeting

6. The Expert Meeting will adopt its outcome, which will be assessed by member States before being submitted to the Commission on Trade and Goods and Services, the Commodities at its sixth session in February 2002. The final report will be compiled under the authority of the Chairperson after the conclusion of the Meeting.

**SCHEDULE OF THE MEETING**

| 17 October 2001 | 18 October 2001 | 19 October |
|---|---|---|
| Day 1 | Day 2 | Day 3 |
| (10 a.m. – 1 p.m) | (10 a.m. – 1 p.m.) | (10 a.m. – 1 p.m.) |
| Plenary<br><br>Opening statement<br><br>Item 1:<br>Election of officers<br><br>Item 2:<br>Adoption of the agenda and organization of work<br><br>Informals<br><br>Item 3: | Informals (Continued)<br><br>Item 3: (Continued) | Informals (Continued)<br><br>Item 3: (Continued) |
| (3 p.m. – 6 p.m.) | (3 p.m. – 6 p.m.) | (3 p.m. – 6 p.m.) |
| Informals (continued)<br><br>Item 3:<br>(continued) | Informals (continued)<br><br>Item 3:<br>(continued) | Plenary (closing)<br><br>Item 4: Adoption of the outcome of the Meeting |

## Annex

## INPUTS FROM EXPERTS

Experts nominated by members States are invited to submit brief papers in advance of the Meeting to the UNCTAD secretariat. These will be made available to other participants at the Meeting in the form and language in which they are received.

To facilitate a structured exchange of national experiences, experts are invited (but not required) to take into account the topics listed below when preparing inputs. They may choose to give special attention to one or more topics which are of most relevance to their national experience and from which lessons could be drawn for the benefit of the other participants. Concrete illustrative examples are encouraged.

**Possible topics to be addressed**

In line with the United Nations Guidelines on Consumer Protection[1] (as expanded in 1999), the Experts might wish to address the following topics:

**(A) Physical safety**

- Safety regulations, including on imports of products banned from consumption elsewhere.
- National and international standards.
- Voluntary standards and appropriate notices and information of hazards.
- Safety records and checks.

**(B) Promotion of consumers' economic markets**

- Competition rules.
- Advertising rules.
- Legislation on weights and measures, and rules against misrepresentations.
- Specific rules designed to protect consumers in financial contracts.

**(C) Standards for the safety and quality of consumer goods and services**

- Testing facilities and safety certification.
- Adherence to international norms and safety standards.

**(D) Distribution facilities for essential consumer goods and services**

- Creation of adequate storage and distribution centres in rural areas.

**(E) Measures enabling consumers to obtain redress**

- Formulation of redress mechanisms for low-income consumers (small claims courts, etc).
- Information about redress mechanisms for consumers.

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1 (A/C.2/54/L.24)

**(F) Education and information programmes**

- Strengthening consumer awareness and empowering informed choice.
- Environmentally-friendly consumption programmes.

**(G) Promotion of sustainable consumption**

- Promotion of sector-specific environmental-management best practices.
- Gradual removal of subsidies that promote unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.
- Recycling programmes, waste management, etc.

**(H) Measures relating to specific areas, including food, water and pharmaceuticals**

- Product quality control.
- Adequate and secure distribution facilities.
- Standardized international labeling.

**Technical assistance**

- Delegations may wish to inform the UNCTAD secretariat about their needs for advisory services and capacity building in the area of consumer protection.

Experts are kindly requested to submit their papers (hard copy and electronic format), by 30 September 2001 to: Maria-Carmen Ligertwood, Division on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities, UNCTAD, E.8020, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, Tel: ++41 22 907 5559; fax: ++41 22 917 0247;
E-mail: maria-carmen.ligertwood@unctad.org.

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